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Omaha District Commander provides update regarding North Dakota activities

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OMAHA, NE – On November 25, 2016, after coordination with Tribal leaders involved in the ongoing protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline on which some of the land is currently leased to a local rancher for grazing, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers notified Tribal leaders throughout the Missouri River basin by letter that areas of Corps-managed federal property north of the Cannonball River will be closed to the public effective December 5, 2016. The Army Corps of Engineers is seeking a peaceful and orderly transition to a safer location, and has no plans for forcible removal. But those who choose to stay do so at their own risk as emergency, fire, medical, and law enforcement response cannot be adequately provided in these areas. Those who remain will be considered unauthorized and may be subject to citation under federal, state, or local laws. This will reduce the risk of harm to people in the encampments caused by the harsh North Dakota winter conditions

This transition is also necessary to protect the general public from the dangerous confrontations between demonstrators and law enforcement officials which have occurred near this area. “Unfortunately, it is apparent that more dangerous groups have joined this protest and are provoking conflict in spite of the public pleas from Tribal leaders. We are working to transition those engaged in peaceful protest from this area and enable law enforcement authorities to address violent or illegal acts as appropriate to protect public safety,” said Omaha District Commander, Col. John Henderson.

The Army Corps of Engineers has never been able to legally issue a permit for the Oceti Sakowin camp north of the Cannonball River due to the pre-existing grazing lease to a local rancher. However, the Corps has established an area on land south of the Cannonball River for anyone wishing to peaceably protest the Dakota Access pipeline project. In this area, jurisdiction for police, fire, and medical response is better-defined since it is located inside of the Reservation boundary making it a more sustainable area for visitors to endure the harsh North Dakota winter.

“I am very concerned for the safety and well-being of all citizens at these encampments on Corps-managed federal land, and we want to make sure people are in a safe place for the winter,” said Henderson. “We fully support the rights of all Americans to exercise free speech and peacefully assemble, and we ask that they do it in a way that does not also endanger themselves or others, or infringe on others’ rights.”

In the letter and ongoing discussions with Tribal leadership, the Corps will continue to encourage everyone located in this area to peacefully move to the free speech zone south of the Cannonball River or to a more sustainable location for the winter. The Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Indian Affairs will continue

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to work with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to support a winter camp on trust land already identified by the Tribe.